

Bringing H. to Smokey



Hope Mountain



CieAura calls on retailers, customers for help.

by Beth Douglass Silcox

It's early Saturday morning, and hundreds of bright-eyed children gather in a nondescript warehouse, eager to hear words of encouragement and hopeful that the growling of their small stomachs will cease. They are a happy bunch, in spite of the dire circumstances in which they live.

These children make their homes in the shadow of Manila, Philippines, a city of extremes—gleaming metropolitan high-rises and the world's worst slums. *Home* is a relative term in Tondo, one of the most densely populated areas of the world and a suburb of Manila. In 2007, some 187,700 people squeezed into every square mile of this slum-laden area, including Smokey Mountain.

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—Ken Rasner, Founder and CEO, CieAura

Despair

A far cry from North Carolina and Tennessee's beautiful, foggy mountain range, this Smokey Mountain is a dump, literally—a mountain of discarded debris that smokes from the natural decomposition process. And it is the harsh reality in which impoverished Filipinos live and scavenge a daily existence—among them, these kids.



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Bringing Hope to Smokey Mountain

When Ken and Valerie Rasner first visited Tondo's Smokey Mountain, the stark truth was an affront to their senses. The images of despair seared into their mind's eye. Makeshift shelters of stacked cardboard or blankets with holes kept the heat and rain away most of the time and were the only homes these folks had ever known. And the stench was nearly unbearable, causing the Rasners to hold towels over their mouths and noses.

"A toddler there is so hungry, she picks up whatever she can get and eats it," says Ken, founder and CEO of CieAura. "She just happens to be eating from a dump. I have a 2-year-old daughter, and for me to think about her going out to a garbage dump every day to try and find something to eat is horrifying. Yet these children live with that for years. They don't know what else to do. They have no options."

Empowerment

So many in this small region teeter precariously on the edge between life and death. A scarcity of food, clothing, shelter,

education and medical care is the norm. "Beautiful Temple" is the church of Pastor Nixon Rosales and his wife, Cora, but the structure is anything but beautiful. Still, it's a place where hope can be found and where salvation is preached. Pastor Nixon and Cora, on the other hand, as well as the Smokey Mountain kids, who listen intently on Saturday mornings in that nondescript warehouse, are far more beautiful than words can express.

"I had tears in my eyes watching these kids. They were so grateful to have real food." —Ken Rasner

Some 500 Smokey Mountain kids fill the room twice each Saturday to hear Pastor Nixon's stories of God, Christ and hope. The kids play games and win prizes. A boy, holding tightly to a prize he'd



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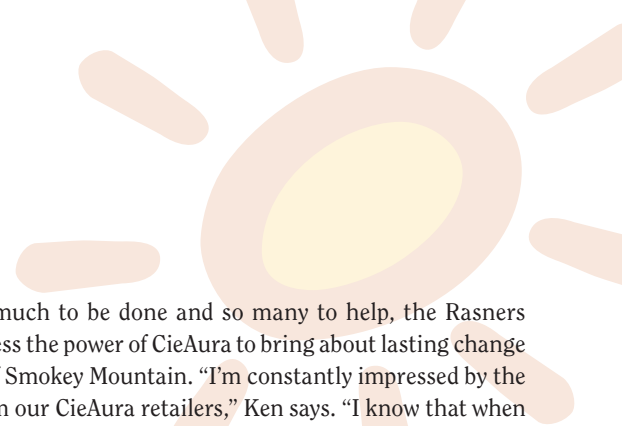


just won, sat down near Ken, and 10 of the boy's buddies reached out in admiration to touch the prize—a small, crushed box of Kellogg's Corn Flakes. "I had tears in my eyes watching these kids. They were so grateful to have real food," Ken says.

"I'm consistently impressed by the level of love from our CieAura retailers. I know that when they hear about the plight of these kids, they will want to help, too." —Ken Rasner

Hope

Valerie Rasner's vivid memories of scantily clothed Smokey Mountain children prompted a kids-helping-kids clothing drive at her California church, and started five charitable years of collecting garments, shoes, food and money that the Rasners took to the mountain personally.



But with so much to be done and so many to help, the Rasners decided to harness the power of CieAura to bring about lasting change for the people of Smokey Mountain. "I'm constantly impressed by the level of love from our CieAura retailers," Ken says. "I know that when they hear about the plight of these kids, they will want to help, too."

Preliminary plans are under way for Malaya House, a safe haven for the kids of Smokey Mountain. "We're going to fund and build a place where they can shower, eat real food and be taught skills and trades so they can get out of there and have a better life," Ken says. Providing some sort of medical care is also a high priority.

As it takes shape, Ken expects Malaya House to be a hybrid orphanage, of sorts, with a cafeteria, a church, playgrounds, classrooms, living facilities and bathrooms. Local Filipino workers will assist in caring for and teaching the children. "Our goal would be to start serving between 200 and 300 kids, and then to work up from there," Ken says.

Valerie's expectation of Malaya House is to provide hope to hopeless parents. "It's not an orphanage where the kids are dumped and left,"



she says. "The thought is to give parents and children a place to learn skills that can help them become productive members of society, feel good about themselves and help their world."

Action

Childhood forms adulthood. So without intervention, many Smokey Mountain kids are bound to repeat the pattern of poverty with their own children, just as their parents have. Breaking that cycle depends upon building self-esteem, teaching lifelong habits like hygiene, and presenting them with options. "Pastor Nixon Rosales gives them so much hope and the knowledge that the outside world can be different," Valerie says.

"We know that this type of poverty is not unique to the Philippines. There are places all around the world," Ken says. But he's witnessed this desperation firsthand and is certain CieAura retailers and customers can deliver hope to Smokey Mountain. "When a person orders CieAura chips, if we can get \$1 or \$2 donated with each order, we can change the lives of these children from disease to health and from hopeless to hopeful," Ken says. "There's room for everybody to help, and there's a blessing for everyone who does." ■